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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CU](#) [TD](#)

SUBJECT: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: GOVERNMENT TAKES CASTRO'S  
RESIGNATION IN STRIDE, NO MAJOR CHANGES IN RELATIONS  
FORESEEN

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Foreign Ministry noted in an official February 19 statement that the resignation of Fidel Castro would not affect the cordial relations between TT and Cuba. The communique noted Cuban assistance to Trinidad and "saluted" Castro, but was measured in tone. Speaking on February 20, PM Manning was a bit more effusive, noting that Castro "has been a friend to many in the Caribbean, including myself." Press commentary was mixed. For their parts, various trade unions praised Castro as a strong leader and an inspiration. A noted academic observed to us that while the GOTT viewed some human rights and regional issues concerning Cuba with concern, it would never speak out against a long-time friend. Cuban doctors are working in TT, and two "super-farms" projects with Cuban participation are on the horizon. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The TT Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the following communique on February 19 concerning Fidel Castro's resignation:

Begin text: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has noted the announcement of Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz that due to health reasons, he will not accept another five-year term as President and Commander of the Armed Forces. Dr. Castro was elected as a Member of Parliament at the recent elections.

Since December 1972, Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba have had diplomatic relations covering cooperation in a wide range of areas supportive of economic and social development.

Further, over the years, Cuba has provided valuable assistance to Trinidad and Tobago in many ways, through the provision of scholarships, manpower support in the medical services area (mainly doctors and nurses) and technical assistance in the field of agriculture, particularly in respect of the establishment of two large-scale commercial farms to be located at Tucker Valley in Chaguaramas.

The Ministry wishes to recognize and salute the forty-nine years of Dr. Castro's leadership to the people of the Republic of Cuba. The change in Cuban leadership will in no way affect the cordiality or commitment of this Government's relationship with Cuba, and the strengthening of relations at the bilateral level. End Text.

13. (U) The office of TT Prime Minister Patrick Manning said February 19 that Manning was aware of Castro's resignation, but had no official position to offer. A day later, however, Manning told the press (at a joint news conference with

visiting Barbados PM David Thompson) that, "President Castro has been a friend to many in the Caribbean, including myself.

There's hardly a country in the Caribbean who is not in a position to say they have gone to the Government of Cuba for assistance of one kind or the next and it did not come." Manning then recalled his heart valve replacement surgery in Cuba in 1998 and his 2005 pacemaker implant there. Manning concluded that he intended to send Castro a letter thanking the Cuban for his services to the Caribbean.

14. (U) Meanwhile, several Trinbagonian trade union leaders lauded Castro. David Abdullah, president of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions and NGOs, called Castro "a remarkable human being and an outstanding leader who has provided inspiration to millions the world over in their struggle for social justice, equity, dignity and peace." Lyle Townsend, general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, hailed the Cuban as "an inspiration to all progressive trade union leaders in the country, and the best Caribbean leader we have seen for 100 years." Curtis John, president of the Aviation Communication and Allied Workers Union, said Castro was a "very strong leader" who "had an open door policy for trade unions."

15. (U) For its part, press commentary was mixed, with the perceived good and bad of Cuba being remarked upon. "The Guardian" slightly skewed its editorial comment to the positive side (and also focused on commercial opportunities if Cuba goes capitalist) while "Newsday" took a slightly negative slant (noting alleged accomplishments on the island, but concluding that Castro's rule "prevented Cuba from becoming a modern nation").

16. (SBU) An academic at the University of the West Indies told us February 20 that the GOTT had maintained a

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traditionally friendly posture toward Cuba. He added that a number of Cuban doctors contracted by the GOTT provide health services in remote rural areas, where they are much appreciated, and that Cuba provided free scholarships for medical students from the region. In addition, as the MFA statement acknowledged, Cuba is participating in the establishment of two large-scale commercial farms to be located in Chaguaramas. The GOTT hopes the farms, once up and producing, will help curtail rapid local food price inflation. The academic noted that the GOTT had occasionally shown some concern over specific Cuban human rights issues, but would never act in a condemnatory manner toward Castro or Cuba.

17. (SBU) Comment: Trinidad and Tobago's relationship with Cuba is not dissimilar to that of many states in the region. While not seeing the Castro regime as a model, many Trinis also see little reason to condemn a Caribbean brother and have some sympathy for its "struggles" and travails. Manning most recently visited Cuba in September of 2007, where he met with Raul Castro, opened a trade facilitation office and spoke about eventually opening an Embassy there (TT's High Commissioner to Jamaica is accredited to Cuba and Cuba opened an Embassy in TT in 1996 -- conveniently co-located with a private auto parts store). The GOTT also is supportive of Cuban inclusion in regional bodies and Port of Spain serves as the home of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) that includes Cuba. That said, the GOTT also knows which side of the divide it lives in and, for instance, the Cuban Ambassador here has not been invited to any of the Summit of the Americas planning meetings we have attended.

AUSTIN